

**SAINT  
MARY  
EUPHRASIA PELLETIER**



**FOUNDRESS OF THE  
SISTERS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD**



# **SAINT MARY EUPHRASIA PELLETIER**

## **FOUNDRESS OF THE SISTERS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

**AUTHOR UNKNOWN**

**COVER ART:** Christ, The Good Shepherd, model of the Community...



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THERE was an enigmatic smile on Sister Marie's face as she watched the children at play. Standing a little apart from the noisy group she fingered the large rosary beads that hung by her side. With eyes narrowed somewhat quizzically, she watched her young charges—or, to put it more correctly, she watched one of them. The girl singled out for this special attention was not aware at all of the attention for she was completely absorbed in the game, the game in which she seemed to be the life, the center, and originator all at the same time. She was a slight, agile girl not yet in her teens, with a wealth of black hair, flashing dark eyes, and a tanned complexion beneath the momentary flush of excitement. Racing here, there, everywhere; talking, gesticulating, and marshalling her companions, all at the same time, she seemed a dynamo of energy. Now she dashed across the playground passing close by her mistress. The latter suddenly stopped her and said, "Rose Virginia, one day you will be either an angel or a devil."

The words were spoken solemnly with a hint of fear in the nun's voice. No doubt, she envisioned the life of this gifted child as a precipitous and tortuous route, beset with snares and pitfalls with the girl's own energetic and willful nature capable of landing her on perilous ground.

The dark, luminous eyes of Rose Virginia saw none of these things, so she smiled serenely up at her teacher and replied, "I—but I'm going to be a nun."

For Rose Virginia, life had no complications—one came from God and one went to God—it was as simple as that and already her small feet were firmly set on that direct though arduous route. This, thanks to her saintly mother.

Madame Pelletier lived the Gospel precepts. Therefore, before Rose had learned in her catechism that great commandment that



is the condition of our entering into life, she saw her mother practice it. As a child lying in her cot, not fully awake in the early dawn, she could see her mother kneeling motionless, rapt in prayer or a few years later when she accompanied her to some remote barn where the Sacrifice of the Mass was offered at the risk of the lives of all present. (It was the epoch of the French Revolution and Rose Virginia Pelletier was a little French girl, living on the island of Noirmoutier, off the coast of France.) Rose also learned that other commandment (which is like unto the first) when she toddled by her mother's side on errands of charity to the homes of the poor.

Madame Pelletier would enter one of these houses where the mother lay ill and the children were hungry and unkempt. While inquiring after the health of the sufferer she would push open a window to admit God's air and sunshine. Then would follow the question—a very echo of Christ's own.

"Have you anything to eat?" At the negative reply, the beribboned bonnet was removed, the rich cloak laid aside, and Madame Pelletier began reviving the ashes on the hearth. The children, dirty-faced, hanging shyly around the door, would come forward to help and soon there would be hot soup for everyone. Then the room would be tidied up, children's clothes seen to and a hundred other "little nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love performed.

No wonder that the workers from the countryside would exclaim, "Oh, the angel has been here today," when, on coming home, they were greeted with smiling faces and a warm supper. Yes, Rose Virginia was fortunate in her mother.

Doctor Pelletier, Rose's father, touched her life less nearly. However, if punishment for the sins of parents is visited on their



children, the blessings that follow from the good deeds of parents are no less the inheritance of their offspring. Dr. Pelletier was known far and wide for his charity to the poor at whose service he gratuitously placed his medical skill. More than once, he brought into his house poor patients whom he found ill-lodged and had them tended by his own wife.

He died when Rose was but ten years old. It was her second acquaintance with death, for the previous year her favorite sister, Emilie, had died at the age of fifteen. At that time, Rose had been quite bewildered as she looked at the still form of her once gay and lively companion—with whom she had roamed the meadows and gathered wildflowers for Our Lady's altar. Wide-eyed with wonder, Rose would listen to Emilie's stories. There was something of hero worship in the admiration she developed for this sister who was six years her senior, who could do so many things and seemed to know everything. However, as she looked at her now lying so still on her white bed, surrounded by the flowers she loved, Rose's eyes were larger and more thoughtful than usual—she was puzzling it out—why? whither? why had she to go alone? Rose could find no answer except that God willed it. Her mother had told her that and had added, "And since He willed it, it has to be all right, in fact it is the very best thing that could happen, otherwise God wouldn't will it."

At that, Rose sighed a deep, deep sigh. Getting up from where she had been kneeling for an hour, she bent over the still form, pressed a long warm kiss on the cold, unresponsive cheek, and went out of the room. Life without the pleasant companionship of this her heroine, her little second mother, promised to be very drab indeed.



As a result of this death, Rose became more attached than ever to her mother. Shortly afterwards, Dr. Pelletier fell seriously ill. From the moment he was confined to bed, he knew that it was the end and he took long counsel with his wife, arranging for the future of the family. These matters settled, Dr. Pelletier turned all his thoughts Heavenward. Rose would while away the tedious hours of his illness by reading to him passages from the Imitation of Christ and other spiritual books.

They closed his eyes in death and for the first time in her life Madame Pelletier broke down and wept. Rose had never seen her weep and had never seen her so listless. It was as if all the interest had suddenly gone out of life for her. She who had always been so full of plans had nothing to suggest now, although the very death of her husband necessitated many changes. Rose looked on in silence, for she could find no word of comfort in her own sad heart, and the shadow of this cross fell athwart their lives for many a day.

When at length time cleared it away, there stood revealed a new Rose, no longer a child despite her ten years, but a woman matured by suffering and sobered by the responsibility she felt towards her mother. Now, they seemed to have exchanged roles—it was no longer Rose who looked to the mother for support and guidance. Instead, it was the mother who leaned on Rose. She found Rose to be what many another broken spirits would find her in later years—a very tower of strength.

After the death of Dr. Pelletier, the family continued to live on Noirmoutier for four more years. In 1810, it was decided that they would return to their place of origin—Soullansand. Rose was to be placed in a boarding school at Tours. The parting between mother and daughter was painful in the extreme, for in those days



of slow and difficult travel boarders did not go home for the holidays. So, even if all went well, they could not hope to see each other again for at least four years. Madame Pelletier, however, had a presentiment that all would not go well. She already felt at the end of her strength. That was why she could trust herself to say no word as they parted. So, they embraced each other in silence—not knowing that they would never meet again on this side of the grave.

## **SCHOOL DAYS**

It did not take long for Rose to settle down in her new surroundings. Intelligent and anxious to learn as she was, she found life in a boarding school full of new interests.

Soon, however, she noticed that all was not well there. The Superior—Madame Chobelets—though a woman of sterling qualities—was constantly changing the rules of the little community. The result was that the head mistress left the school and joined the Ursulines. This mistress had been greatly revered by the pupils, so the pupils, by way of a mistaken loyalty, determined to give as much trouble as possible to her successor. A young nun, Mlle. de Lignac, was appointed to the charge and Rose Virginia's heart was sore for her as she saw how the girls planned daily some new devices to give her trouble.

Rose felt that she must do something to help, so one evening she got together a few of her friends. She had a suggestion to make. Were they not tired of being naughty? Did they really get satisfaction out of it anyway? Well, why not turn over a new leaf? The beautiful feast of Pentecost was at hand. Suppose they try to be good and obedient by way of preparation for it. Rose and her natural eloquence exhorted them not to grieve the Holy Spirit.



Her earnestness was so irresistible that she succeeded in making all her companions amenable to discipline once more. Mlle. de Lignac knew well whom she had to thank for this and a sincere affection grew between teacher and pupil, which later developed into a lifelong friendship.

Only too soon, Rose was to have sore need of a friend. In June of 1813, without any premonition, she suddenly learned that her mother had died. This loss was almost too much for her. All her school-day dreams had centered around the time when she and her mother would be reunited. How many times during the long preparation had she not heartened herself with that hope and now, fortunately, Mlle. de Lignac was at her side. With all the sympathy of her rich nature, she strove to comfort the lonely girl. After the first uncontrollable outbursts of grief, Rose endeavored to look upon this cross, crushing though it was, with the eyes of faith—and, in this as in all things, to press the Will of God to her heart.

Rose Virginia's nature had been tempered and refined by a series of painful losses in the deaths of her dear ones—first her favorite sister, then her father, and finally her mother.

Yet, other trials awaited her. The next year, her dearly loved Mlle. de Lignac, with five other nuns, left the school and joined the Ursulines. Rose was now seventeen. It was time for her to think of her future. That she would be a nun there was no doubt—but where? Mlle. de Lignac and she had long talks together. Why would Rose not come with her and be an Ursuline? It was a tempting proposal for she was admirably suited as a teacher and a leader. Besides, the work gave scope for doing much good; in fact, the crying need of the time was for the Christian education of the young. Rose gave the matter serious consideration but at length



came to the conclusion that God was not calling her to the company of Saint Ursula. Left behind in the now dreary boarding school, Rose Virginia devoted much time to prayer that she might discover God's Will.

The Order of Carmel held a strong attraction for her as she was an ardent admirer of Saint Teresa, and one of her classmates—Marie Angelique Dernee—was just about to enter the Carmelite convent at Tours. Without doubt, Rose would have gone with her had she not caught a glimpse of another congregation—the white-robed Sisters of the Refuge. Their convent was not far from the school and, when Rose was out for walks with other pupils, she occasionally caught sight of a white figure on the grounds. Sometimes, as she paid a visit to the Convent Chapel, she heard the nuns singing the Office behind the grille and could faintly distinguish them bowing reverently at the Gloria Patri, like so many angelic spirits in the presence of the Most High.

It was on one of these occasions that she felt certain that this was where she should be a nun. Accordingly, one evening, when out walking with one of the teachers, Rose induced her companion to go in with her to the Refuge that she might speak to the Mother Superior of her desire and offer herself as a prospective postulant. The Superior received her kindly and promised to accept her as soon as she had obtained consent of her family. Rose was overjoyed and on their way back her companion remarked that she had never seen her in such high spirits.

It was later than usual when they reached the school and on knocking at the door what was not their dismay to find it opened by the Superior—Madame Chobelets herself. There was no mistaking her displeasure as she sharply enquired where they had been. Immediately, Rose confessed everything—her desire to be a



Refuge nun, her interview with the Superior, and its success. Madame Chobelets was beside herself with disappointment. She had fondly hoped that Rose would join her own Association and keep it from falling into the ruin that threatened it since the departure of her six best subjects. When she spoke, however, scorn rather than displeasure rang in her voice. To enter the Refuge indeed! One of her pupils—it was unthinkable! Did Rose know the type of people with whom she would be associating there? Why had she not asked the advice of those who knew better? Madame Chobelets ran on and on, and finally ordered Rose to bed immediately without supper. A very crestfallen and somewhat bewildered Rose retired to her icy bed in the large cold dormitory. Sleep was out of the question and alone in the dark she pondered over the words she had just heard so scornfully spoken.

Did she know the type of people she would be associating with in the Refuge? Yes, she did. The nuns would be her own type—cultured women of respectable family, for the founder of the Congregation had laid it down as one of the most important qualifications required in postulants that they be of respectable family and irreproachable character. As for the other inmates, the girls and women whom the nuns sheltered there, she knew who they were too. It was for such as these that Christ had come upon earth—not for the just but for sinners. It was over the repentance of one such that there was more joy among the angels of God than for ninety-nine just and if Christ had gloried in being called the Friend of sinners why should it be so unthinkable that one of Madame Chobelets's pupils should devote her life to such as these? Did she not profess to train her girls on the model of Christ and what could be more Christ-like than to stretch out a helping hand to the fallen?



Rose's thoughts were interrupted by the shuffle of footsteps groping in the dark and a voice whispering, "Are you there, Rose? I managed to get you some biscuits and Henriette will be up directly with a cup of hot chocolate. It is a downright shame to have sent you to bed hungry this perishing night—and for nothing at all, too. All the girls say—"

But Rose cut her short saying, "Pauline, don't trouble to bring me anything for I shall not eat it. Thanks very much all the same; but really I could not disobey Madame Chobelets's orders like that and I don't feel a bit hungry; so run down and tell Henrietta not to bring up the chocolate."

"But you shouldn't have been punished like this," protested the other.

"Perhaps not," said Rose with a sigh, "but since Madame Chobelets thinks differently we shall leave it at that. . . ."

Thanks again, Pauline. Tell Henriette not to come up—  
Goodnight."

Rose turned over and pursued this subject of her vocation. There was no disgrace in her becoming a Refuge nun—she had satisfied herself on that point. The next step was to get her family's consent. On her mother's death, Monsieur Marsaud, her brother-in-law, had been appointed her guardian. She would write to him, yes, next morning she would write to him. This resolution taken, she fell asleep and dreamed that she was eating hot chicken soup in the Refuge convent and that Madame Chobelets and Monsieur Marsaud were skating on the ice in the garden pond!

Next morning she wrote her letter. The reply was prompt but was not favorable. Frankly, her family was aghast at the proposal. Good Heavens, why the Refuge? What was she thinking of? If she



wanted to be a nun, let her go to Carmel or to the newly founded congregation of the Sacred Heart, and they would not object, but the Refuge was out of the question—and that was final.

Rose knew that further argument by letter would be useless so she bided her time until she went on a visit to her sister, Madame Marsaud. Here she pleaded her cause so well that she won over her sister and together they prevailed upon Monsieur Marsaud to give his consent; which he at length did, reluctantly enough.

"Since she had to set her heart on it," he said, she might enter when she chose, "but she was not to bind herself by vows until she had attained the age of twenty-one. The responsibility of this very doubtful step should be her own."

So, on 20 October 1814, Rose Virginia entered the Refuge convent at Tours. She was just eighteen years old.

## **AT THE REFUGE**

Everything in the convent delighted the new postulant, and the words of the psalmist often rose to her lips:

"Blessed are they that dwell in Thy House, O Lord,  
they shall praise Thee forever and ever  
for better is one day in Thy courts above thousands."

Wherever she turned in the cloister or corridor some pious sentence inscribed on the walls met her gaze and raised her thoughts heavenward. She was particularly struck by one that ran, "Holiness becometh Thy House." Each time her eyes lighted on it, she felt urged to still greater efforts after perfection. The rich spirituality of the founder, Saint John Eudes, was unfolded to



her and she reveled in his writings and especially in his cult of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, which was not at that time universally practiced as it is today.

The nuns on their side were equally charmed with this new postulant. Many of them were old and broken in health, from sad experiences during the Revolution. Many had escaped the guillotine by a mere chance and all looked forward to the future with fear and gloomy foreboding, for that very year—1814—Napoleon had fallen and France was again threatened with chaos and revolution.

However, Rose came among them as one with hope; she had visions of a glowing future. Upon hearing her describe those hopes and visions, the nuns smiled indulgently at what they deemed her inexperience. Yet her cheerful words and bright ways were a tonic to their broken spirits and they eagerly sought her companionship at recreation. It must have been a pleasant picture to see them—the nuns, old and worn, one crippled with rheumatism, another hard of hearing, a third leaning heavily on a crutch—and Rose, a slim, girlish figure in her long postulant's dress, her face aglow with the ardor and enthusiasm that filled her soul. They listened to her spellbound while she spoke of her burning desire to save souls—hundreds of them, thousands of them—to snatch them from the brink of hell and lead them to the feet of the Good Shepherd.

She had read these words in the first chapter of the constitutions of the congregation.

“A soul is of more value than a world, and consequently to assist in withdrawing it out of the abyss of sin is a greater work than to create an entire world and to bring it out of nothing into being.”



The more she learnt of the vocation of the Refuge, the more highly did she value it. To attend the sick in hospitals, to assuage the pains of the wounded, to relieve the fever-stricken—all these were admirable works of charity but as heaven is above earth, as the soul is above the body, so is the work of sheltering and saving souls greater than all possible works of charity that can be performed.

One day, ten months after her entry, Rose was summoned to the Superior's room and informed that she was to be clothed in the Holy Habit the following week. The Superior asked if there was any particular saint whose name she would like to bear. Rose jumped at the suggestion—Oh! Yes, she wanted to be called Sister Mary of Saint Theresa. Her promptness and decision took the Superior somewhat aback—this postulant was all very well but she was just a little too sure of herself—too sure of what she wanted and too ardent in the wanting.

"Saint Teresa," exclaimed the Superior, "but she is far too great a saint for you. Look for a humbler patroness, child; one whom you can more easily imitate."

It was a disappointment but Rose quickly brushed it aside, no setback could keep down her high spirits for any length of time—disappointments, humiliations, hard work—she took them all in stride and "rejoiced as a giant" to run her course. Besides, had she not enlisted as a follower of Christ and where would He be leading except towards Calvary's mound? So she turned over the pages of the religious calendar and her eyes fell on "Saint Euphrasia—Virgin." She had never heard of this saint before, the name would surely be humble enough. It was.

On the morning of the Clothing, Rose's heart beat "high for joy" as does the heart of every postulant on that day. As she passed along



the cloister on her way to the chapel, she stopped to kneel for a moment in front of a large crucifix that stood there. Suddenly, as she looked up into the face of the dying Christ, a shaft of flame seemed to issue forth from the figure on the cross. It smarted and pierced her own heart, setting it on fire with a thirst for souls. There and then, she solemnly promised to devote herself until her dying day to that same cause for which Christ died, and to spend herself and be spent in reclaiming souls for Him.

Sister Mary of Saint Euphrasia, as we shall now call her, passed the first year of her noviceship learning the obligations of the religious life and becoming acquainted with the difficulties of the apostolate to which she was about to devote her life.

She found only one thing to be hard—the enforced inactivity of the noviceship. Complaining of this to her Superior, she was told to utilize her spare time in reading the Scriptures and the Lives of the Saints. She did so and found in them a mine of wisdom and sanctity. While still a novice, she was given such a realization of the value of obedience that she begged to be allowed to make a private vow of that virtue a year before her profession, for it seemed to her that she was losing an incalculable amount of merit in not having her actions consecrated by vow. This privilege was granted to her. When her "spiritual year," as it is called, was over, Sister M. of Saint Euphrasia, though still a novice, was appointed second in charge of the penitents. Now she was in direct contact with souls and placed herself completely at their service. While they worked, she would read to them in her firm, clear voice, and she enlivened their recreations as she did those of the nuns. Her bright smile and magnetic personality shed a light and warmth on what had formerly been a humdrum and drab existence. In this occupation, so dear to her heart, the second year of the novitiate passed quickly by.



## PROFESSION AND AFTERWARDS

When Sister M. of Saint Euphrasia was twenty-one years old, she was allowed to take the vows of religion.

Besides the three ordinary vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, the Refuge nuns and the Good Shepherd nuns of today take a fourth—that of laboring for the salvation of souls. At Profession, the novice is given a silver heart to symbolize the exchange of hearts that should take place between Christ and His spouse.

In the case of Sister M. of Saint Euphrasia, it was no mere symbol, for if it could be said of Saint Paul, "Cor Pauli, Cor Christi," the heart of this young nun seemed likewise to be the very heart of Christ. All her aspirations and interests were His, all her thoughts and preoccupations were of how best to further His glory and, when she dreamt at night,—for now she had no time to dream by day—it was of more onerous undertakings and a more widespread apostolate.

Almost immediately after Profession she was given full charge of the young girls—a difficult and responsible post. However, this young mistress reveled in overcoming difficulties; the impossible did not exist for her. She allowed no day to pass without giving an instruction to the "children" as she called them, and she discovered that ignorance rather than malice was the cause of the fall of most of them. The girls knew she had the heart of a mother for them and there was nothing that they would not do for their young mistress. Many of them had seen little kindness in the world and now experienced for the first time the tender solicitude of one whose sole aim in life seemed to be to help them—that of



itself brought out what was best in their nature. They took the hand so lovingly outstretched to them and set their faces once more towards the good and the right, the noble and the beautiful.

Sister M. of Saint Euphrasia showed them the way and, within a remarkably short time, many of them had become so virtuous and united to God that they aspired to the religious life. Nothing would do them but to consecrate to Him all that remained to them of life. Of course, they could not become Refuge nuns—the stipulations of the Founder with regard to postulants put that out of the question, so they entered elsewhere, in such congregations as would receive them. Unfortunately, they did not always succeed when transplanted from the Refuge. Many of them had been underprivileged at the outset of life and had been brought up in an atmosphere not congenial to virtue. Therefore, the same stability could not be expected from them as from those whose home life had fostered virtue in them from childhood.

Sister M. of Saint Euphrasia was the first to realize this, and gradually she began to ask herself if something could be done to allow of these girls to form a community of their own within the shelter of the Refuge. They would be like so many Magdalens whose virtuous and penitential lives would be for an odor of sweetness to Christ in the tabernacle as was the precious ointment of their great prototype. The more she thought of it, the more the project seemed feasible.

At length, she broached the subject to her Superior, who thought it far too novel an idea to be practicable. Nevertheless, she gave the matter due consideration and asked the advice of the senior Sisters of the community. One and all, they voted against it—the risks involved in making the experiment were too great. Sister M. of Saint Euphrasia accepted their decision in peace though this



was one of the few occasions when she experienced that obedience can be bitter as well as sweet. However, she bowed her head and murmured, "Thy Will be done."

The girls benefited by her wise direction for eight years. Then, when not yet thirty years old, she was elected Superior. The very first time she addressed her assembled community, after telling them how unworthy she felt of the confidence they were placing in her, she added, "But since you have made me Superior, I intend to found the Magdalens straight away."

That is exactly what she did. Mother Pelletier, as we shall now call her, gave the Magdalens the Carmelite Rule and Habit, with slight modifications. Her school-day friend—Marie Angelique Dernee—who was now Superior of the Carmelite Convent at Tours—was of the greatest assistance to her in this and took such an interest in the project that she and her nuns made the habits for the first Magdalens. The undertaking was a great success and still is today. Magdalen communities are found in every Province of the Good Shepherd Order throughout the world. They take vows, say the Office of Our Lady in choir, work mostly at the making of vestments and altar linens, and live saintly lives known only to God.

Next, the young Superior bought some adjacent houses and enlarged the girls' apartments so accommodation could be afforded to greater numbers. Then, seeing how many young girls fell into evil ways through lack of protection, she organized a separate establishment within the Convent for the preservation of children exposed to vice. She had an eye to everything, improved their food and clothing, and in her motherly solicitude attended to the least detail. When she was in the midst of these manifold activities and her Convent resembled a humming beehive—



everybody active, everybody happy—something happened that sent a thrill of joy through her heart. She received a letter from the Bishop of Angers—a neighboring town—asking her to found a Convent of the Refuge in that town as many girls there were in sore need of protection. He promised her a great harvest of souls. Before she had read the letter through, Mother Pelletier was on her knees thanking God. Here at last was realization of her dreams!

She went to Angers immediately and by July of that same year—1829—had established the Convent there amidst the direst poverty.

Imagine having but one mattress in the entire house for five Sisters. So, Mother Pelletier suggested that they take night about sleeping on it. Somehow, nothing seemed hard when she led the way, though their dinner at times consisted of boiled nettles.

A former penitentiary at Angers had been called the House of the Good Shepherd. The appropriateness of the title pleased Mother Pelletier and she adopted it for her new Convent. Henceforth, it would be known as The Good Shepherd.

Still Superior of the Refuge at Tours, Mother Pelletier appointed another nun to direct the house at Angers and she returned to her own community. She continued to help the new enterprise in every way possible. The establishment of a new foundation is always difficult. It was rendered doubly so by a political crisis—the anti-clerical revolution of 1830. Soon the Refuge of Tours was in straitened circumstances itself. The novices had to return to their families as a result, but the courage and energy of the young Superior weathered the storm. The following year, her term of office as Superior expired and she was charged with the direction of the house at Angers. Here, she was in her element—everything



succeeded with her—benefactors came forward and postulants presented themselves. Within four months of her return, she had seventeen novices and was building a chapel large enough to accommodate three hundred nuns. Up at four in the morning, she and the sisters helped with the work by removing the sand and filling in the earth—and this was when she was already suffering from the ailment that was to bring her to the grave.

Some of the older nuns fell ill and the novices were still too inexperienced to be trusted with the care of the "children." Mother Pelletier appealed to Tours for help. Could they send her a capable sister for a few months until her novices were trained? The reply came back. "No." She then appealed to the Refuge at Nantes. No, they could spare nobody. It was in these straits, when she did not know where to turn for assistance, that Mother Pelletier conceived the idea of the Generalate. She determined that any convent founded from Angers had better remain united to it and subject to its Superior, for union is strength; and she did not wish that others experience the difficulties she was then struggling against.

In 1833, a request came from the town of Le Mans asking her to found a Refuge there. This was another opportunity for her apostolic zeal. Before establishing that foundation, she discussed her project of the Generalate with the bishop of Angers. He quite fell in with her views and got the sisters destined for the new convent to sign an engagement by which they bound themselves to remain united to Angers and under the jurisdiction of its Superior.



## THE GENERALATE

The bishop now appealed to Rome for permission to form the Generalate.

As soon as the project became known, it was violently opposed by the Refuge convents. They considered it traitorous to change the constitutions given them by their holy founder, not realizing that Saint John Eudes had legislated for a period when a few isolated Refuges through the country were sufficient for the need of the time—that was in 1642.

Now in the nineteenth century, with the industrial revolution changing the face of Europe, crowding together armies of factory workers—men, women and children—into ever-growing cities, the social evils that the Refuge sought to counteract were multiplied.

A few isolated convents would have been hopelessly inadequate under the changed circumstances. That was why, at this juncture, God raised up Mother Pelletier, "the most illustrious daughter of Saint John Eudes," to supplement his work.

The nuns of Tours, however, did not realize this. It was an instance of the prophet not being recognized in his own country. They accused her of pride and ambition and of being a traitor to their traditions. They believed she was willing to upset everything, provided she obtained the power to which she aspired. We must not blame them unduly, for they were actuated by an upright intention and feared Mother Pelletier's "rashness" might result in ruin for the whole Order. Besides, Mother Pelletier belonged to the rank of geniuses and geniuses ipso facto are incomprehensible to ordinary mortals. Moreover, she was destined to be a saint, and has not the Model and Exemplar of all the saints said, "If they have persecuted me they will also persecute you?" However, a



saint is not synonymous with a stoic and Mother Pelletier's sensitive heart bled at seeing herself become an object of distrust to her former Sisters. She wept as many tears as would float a ship at the unworthy motives attributed to her.

Meanwhile, she was asked to found three new convents at Poitiers, Grenoble, and Metz, which she did.

At Rome, the question of the Generalate was under consideration. Mother Pelletier's opponents enlisted the support of fourteen Church dignitaries, archbishops, and bishops. His Lordship of Le Mans was among them. He insisted that their convent in his diocese break all ties with Angers. Half the community remained loyal to the Foundress and returned to the motherhouse. The others fell in with the bishop's wishes and formed an independent Refuge convent. All these prelates denounced Mother Pelletier to the Pope as being an ambitious woman. As His Holiness, Gregory XVI, listened to accusation after accusation against her he suddenly asked the secretary, "What defense does this nun make for herself?"

"None, your Holiness," was the reply.

"Then," said the Pope, "she is in the right"

Thereupon, he gave his approbation. The Generalate was an accomplished fact.

In Angers, the nuns were assembled at recreation when suddenly the church bell rang out three times. It could never be discovered who rang it, but it was afterwards ascertained that its chiming synchronized with the signing of the decree at Rome.



## DREAMS COME TRUE

Now that Rome had spoken, the storm quieted. Mother Pelletier was able to give her undivided attention to the training of her many novices. Soon SOSs from all over France came to her—bishops asking her help in reclaiming the all-too-many victims of the demoralizing conditions engendered by the new economic order.

In response to their appeals, she sent forth her nuns to Saint Florent, Puy, Strasbourg, Sens, Rheims, Arles, Amiens, Lyons, Bourges, Chambery, and Lille. They went across the frontiers into Italy to transform the women's prison in Rome from a dungeon of despair into a haven of peace whence numerous souls, repentant and purified, have gone to join in Heaven the ranks of those who "sing forever the mercies of the Lord." Northwards, too, they went into Belgium and Germany. Within twelve years of the foundation at Angers, there was also a Good Shepherd Convent in the heart of Protestant London. By 1842, Mother Pelletier's daughters were embarking for far away America, where many an emigrant girl, friendless and on the verge of despair, was to find within their fold a home and peace of soul. Requests came from sweltering Algeria and the Emerald Isle, and Mother Pelletier's overflowing charity refused none. The Novitiate in Angers began to take on a cosmopolitan character as postulants arrived from every country in Europe. Though the diversity of languages was great, the broad, Catholic spirit of the Foundress permeated all with unity of heart and mind. She loved to repeat, "I do not wish it said any longer that I am French. I am Italian, English\*, German, Spanish, African, American, Indian, etc. I belong to every country

\* The majority of French people in Mother Pelletier's day did not make any distinction between Irish, English, or Scottish—they were all "Anglish" to them.



where there are souls to be saved." Her work of saving them was going on apace, but souls are bought at a great price, and that price Mother Pelletier was soon called upon to pay.

## **PAYING THE PRICE**

In 1842, the See of Angers became vacant and was filled by a prelate of domineering personality—Monsignor Angebault. From that time until the day of her death, twenty-six years later, this bishop was a source of suffering to the Holy Foundress. The cause of the trouble lay in this—the congregation was under the protection of one of the Cardinals at Rome whereas the bishop wished to have supreme jurisdiction over it himself. Accordingly, he appealed to Rome for a change in the constitutions. Rome refused his request and the full brunt of his displeasure fell on Mother Pelletier. He aimed to depose her. Matters were aggravated by the defection of one of her daughters who wished to renounce her vocation. In trying to excuse her own action, she laid the blame of it on her Superior. This nun was an Italian Jewess who had entered the congregation in the first fervor of her conversion to the Catholic religion. Being well versed in languages, she had been entrusted with translating the correspondence between Angers and Rome, so she knew exactly how matters stood between Mother Pelletier and the Bishop and knew especially that the Bishop would lend a ready ear to any complaint she might make against Mother Pelletier. She now revealed to the Bishop all that had passed between Angers and Rome. If she had confined herself to the truth, it would have been bad enough and an unpardonable breach of confidence, but she flagrantly distorted the facts and especially emphasized this—that Mother Pelletier was a tyrant and ruled her community with



an iron hand. What the Bishop heard agreed perfectly with his own prejudices. The Jewess gained her end—she was dispensed from her vows. No blame was attached to her on that account for it was all laid at the door of the Superior.

Then, the Bishop set up an official enquiry into Mother Pelletier's government of her nuns. This lasted ten days during which he questioned each Sister in private. As they had no complaint to make, he concluded that she so tyrannized them that they dared not speak. He wished to have her sent away from Angers but the council opposed him in this. They had elected her Superior and only they could depose her. Then he openly broke off all communication with the convent. It was a most awkward and painful situation—postulants waiting to be clothed, novices waiting to make profession—yet for over a year the Bishop would neither officiate himself nor delegate another to do it in his place. Eventually he did appoint a delegate but he, himself, would have nothing to do with the convent, henceforth. Such, in brief, was the great trial that Mother Pelletier had to undergo. It takes but a few minutes to write about it and still less to read, but to suffer it for twenty-six long years was neither light nor easy. How many sleepless nights! How many painful encounters! Above all, what regrettable consequences, for many of the clergy grew suspicious of the congregation and many postulants were deterred from entering.

It had, however, one transcending good result—it fashioned Mother Pelletier into a saint—I had almost said a martyr. During this time, she made another journey to Rome where she visited the amphitheatre and catacombs. Afterwards she told her daughters that when she compared her trials with those of the martyrs her



own seemed light and easy. Is there not something pathetically human in this great-hearted woman trying to sustain her own courage, as any of us might do, by comparing her trials with those of the saints?

She suffered trials of another nature, too—deaths among her nuns, many of whom had been lifelong, cherished friends. Some had come with her from Tours and had never wavered in their loyalty to her during all those checkered years. Now, she folded their hands, not without a very human sense of loneliness. Others were young, holy, and capable and she had built high hopes upon them. There were also the partings for distant missions, to Austria, Malta, Syria and South America—partings that were almost as final as death.

In 1863, Mother Euphrasia, at the urgent request of His Lordship Most Reverend Doctor Goold, Bishop of Melbourne, sent the first band of Good Shepherd Sisters to Australia. Her maternal heart grieved to expose her loved Daughters to the rigors and danger of such a long sea voyage in the unsteady craft of those days, but her unbounded zeal gave her confidence that proved to be well founded. Four Sisters arrived in Melbourne on 24 June 1863. After a few weeks spent with the kindly Sisters of Mercy at Nicholson Street, they secured a building known as "Abbotsford." The original owner had given it this name because of his great interest in the works of Sir Walter Scott and his famous novel, *Abbotsford*.

Throughout the years, now bordering on a hundred, the work for souls has extended through all Australia and New Zealand. There are Convents in each of the capital cities and several in Victoria



where the Sisters make every effort to cope with the social evils of the day by sheltering and uplifting the many young girls whose checkered careers have endangered their eternal salvation.

Labors, enterprises, intense activity, and physical and moral sufferings were steadily taking a toll on the strength of the Foundress. With her body worn out by labor and sickness and her heart long since broken, she died in the odor of sanctity on 24 April 1868. She was almost seventy-two years of age.

The inscription over her tomb epitomizes her life

“The zeal of Thy House hath eaten me up.”

Somewhere in his poems, Wordsworth asks, “Who is the happy warrior, who is he that every man in arms should wish to be?”

And he gives the answer:

“It is the generous spirit who when brought among the tasks of real life hath wrought upon the plan that pleased his childish thought.”

As a child little Rose Virginia had said, “I’ll be a nun.” We have seen how gloriously she fulfilled her aspiration. She became not only a nun, but the mother and model of a host of nuns.

Today over ten thousand Sisters of the Good Shepherd, scattered in 390 convents the world over, look to her for inspiration and invoke her help.

In sunny Spain and dark Africa, in the great subcontinent of India and the islands of New Zealand, by the mud-locked Irrawaddy



and the ice-bound Saint Lawrence, in China and Japan, Australia and South America, in the materialistic West and among the contemplative races of the East, as far-flung as the Church itself, reaches this white-robed army—the daughters of Mother Pelletier. In Ireland, too—north, south, east, and west—the beneficent work goes on—at the Provincial House in Limerick; in Belfast, Waterford, and New Ross—to mention but a few of the convents—while Good Shepherd missionary nuns prepare for distant fields of labor in Ceylon, India, Africa, and Australia, at their missionary centre—Montenotte, Cork.

On Ascension Day, 1940, all of them, far and near, rejoiced in the triumph of their mother, for on that day the Church set the seal of her approval on the life and work of their holy Foundress, by conferring upon her its highest honor, that of canonization. Well may her daughters apply to her the words of praise given to Judith of old.

“Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honor of thy people.”

**Saint Mary Euphrasia, pray for us.**

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